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## Learning, Labour and Leisure

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Schooling is widely used as a tool of international development. One of the arguments for this is that, in contrast with models of development in which solutions are given to communities in response to problems perceived by foreigners, education is a long-term development solution that "empowers" people by giving them the skills considered necessary for negotiating with outsiders and for making informed decisions about the future of their own communities. This perspective, which supports the use of schooling as a development tool has, of course, been challenged. The exportation of formal schooling to regions that did not have a formal education system before has its roots in colonisation and there is widespread recognition of the fact that schooling is not neutral (e.g. Bishop, 2003, May and Aikman, 2003, Nichol, 2011, Shah, 2015). Attention has also been drawn to the importance of recognising indigenous knowledge and existing forms of education (see for example Ohmagari and Berkes, 1997, Posey, 1983, Quanchi, 2004, Sarangapani, 2003, Sillitoe, 1998, 2010b, Smith, 1999). Despite these critiques, however, it remains important to recognise that there are good reasons for people who don't have access to schooling to want it (May and Aikman, 2003, Nichol, 2011).

In light of these debates around schooling, there is a growing body of research on what children spend their time in school doing, how relevant and appropriate that is to their lives and futures (e.g. Bishop, 2003, Bishop and Glynn, 1999, Kaomea, 2005, Nichol, 2011), and how that use of time in school affects their socialisation (e.g. Levin, 2005). This research asks, as Levin (2005, 473) puts it, "what does being in school do to...children?" An alternative anthropological approach is to ask what *not* being *out of* school does to children. In other words, if schooling is an introduced form of education, what forms of education exist outside of schooling, and how is schooling affecting them? One way of approaching these questions is to analyse schooling's impact on children's time use. What would children have been doing were they not in school?

### Context

These questions are pertinent in the rural highlands of Papua, Indonesia, where state schooling is plagued with problems (Government of Papua Province, et al., 2009, Munro, 2009, 2013, Shah, 2015, The World Bank, 2009, UNDP, 2005) and private schools are seeking to provide alternatives (Shah 2015). One such private school, run by a faith based organisation, was started in a Walak-speaking area of the highlands of Papua in August 2012. The school, Ob Anggen, was started on the initiative of a Walak man and has a vision of empowering families and offering an international standard of education to local Walak children. At the time of my fieldwork it was run by a small team of Papuan teachers and staff in partnership with the wider local community.

My fieldwork, undertaken between October 2012 and April 2014, focused mainly on six small residential areas that surrounded the school. About half of the primary school age<sup>i</sup>

children who lived in these residential areas were enrolled in Ob Anggen, making up just over a third of the total Ob Anggen student population. There were also two state primary schools within walking distance of these residential compounds, but it was difficult to distinguish between children enrolled in them and those not enrolled in any schooling at all as neither state primary school was reliably operational. Consequently, state schooling made little impact on children's time use. Ob Anggen, by contrast, ran daily between 7:30am and 3pm. Lessons included learning the calendar, learning to read, mathematics, physical education, art, learning Bible stories and singing.

To investigate the impact of enrolment in Ob Anggen on children's time use, I carried out extensive participant observation, a 'shadow' study using a form of focal following with sixteen girls of various ages from all six residential areas, and a randomised spot observation study which gave insight into both Ob Anggen and non Ob Anggen children's time use.<sup>ii</sup>

### **The Impact of Schooling**

The spot observation data suggests that the activities Ob Anggen children are missing out on most by attending school are playing, social activities, and being idle or resting. Children are also doing less childcare as a consequence of going to school, girls are missing out on gardening and harvesting, boys may be missing out on time spent in construction, and children of both genders may be missing out on attending funerals.<sup>iii</sup> Graph 1 shows how much more frequently Ob Anggen children were observed in school activities, and how this affected the time they spent in other activities.

<INSERT GRAPH 1>

Graph 2, which compares Ob Anggen children's time use when school activities are excluded with non Ob Anggen children's time use, shows that once the influence of schooling is accounted for the differences between the two groups all but disappear. The three activities Ob Anggen children were most frequently observed doing outside of school were playing, social activities and being idle or resting. Both the order and the percentage of times these activities were observed echo observations of non Ob Anggen children very closely. In fact, the only valid difference<sup>iv</sup> between the two groups once schooling was accounted for was a difference in childcare, which Ob Anggen children were not observed doing at all. As this shows, children who are enrolled in Ob Anggen are still spending the majority of their time outside of school in very similar ways to those who aren't enrolled in Ob Anggen, and the differences in children's overall time use are attributable to the impact of schooling.

<INSERT GRAPH 2>

Although, as Graph 1 shows, schooling dominates Ob Anggen children's time use during daylight hours, it seems to affect some activities more than others. For example, a comparison of Ob Anggen girls' and non Ob Anggen girls' time use shows a valid difference for gardening and harvesting, but not for cooking. This, I argue, is due to an important aspect of children's life which is indirectly restricted by schooling: mobility. The Ob Anggen school day finishes at about 3pm; most gardening, funerals, community events, socialising, work parties and construction begin to come to a close between about 2pm and dusk. Thus, there was rarely much point in Ob Anggen children travelling far for activities such as these: they wouldn't be able to stay the night, as they had to be at school the next morning and by the time they got to where they were going, most people who were not staying the night would

already be heading home. Consequently, during the week Ob Anggen children usually played near the school area, walked home to their own residential area, or went to gardens or events that were nearby. In short, activities that happened close to school or to home compounds were less affected by schooling, whereas activities that happened further afield were more affected.

Do these impacts of schooling on children's time use matter? If children who go to school would otherwise be spending most of their time in leisure and some of their time in labour, aren't they better served by spending their time learning? In order to answer this question, it's important to understand the different ways children's activities are ordered in and outside of school and what this means for their learning.

### **What Is Work?**

A distinction between work and leisure is embedded in schooling, which is structured in a way that prepares children for an adult world in which labour, with all its associated obligations, and leisure, with space for autonomy, are conceptually and temporally separated. In school, learning, which unlike other forms of child labour is considered appropriate children's work, prepares children for future work, whilst autonomous play times during breaks and after school are the precursor of future leisure. These categories are so distinct that even play, when it is used to intentionally produce learning in a classroom, is identified by children as work (Chapparo and Hooper, 2002).

The concept of work employed by schooling does not have universal application though and as many researchers have evidenced (see for example Schwimmer, 1979, Sillitoe, 2010a, Smith, 1994, Stent and Webb, 1975) it does not translate neatly to Melanesian concepts. If work involves the production of something of value (Elkan, 1979, Wallman, 1979), then work, for Melanesians, can be "anything from weeding a garden to taking part in a feast or begetting a child" (Wagner, 1981, 24-25). Positive social relations, for example, are highly valued by Melanesians and the obligations associated with "producing" these relationships can be accompanied by a far greater sense of commitment and effort than subsistence activities such as gardening or harvesting (Sillitoe 2010a). For Walak people the relationships which are "produced" by social "work" are relied upon and valued more than material products are - thus one can defer building an *uma* (women's sleeping house) for one's wife and rely upon relatives for shelter, but one cannot defer attending a close relative's funeral. The exchange of wealth, especially pigs, is an important part of this social "work" for Walak people, as for many New Guinean highlanders (Sillitoe, 2000). Other social "work" includes hosting, visiting, small scale reciprocal exchange transactions between households and the exchange of labour. Whilst in English such social activities are rarely referred to as "work," it does not make sense in Melanesia to distinguish the energy expended on meeting one's social obligations from the energy expended on subsistence activities.

The supernatural is also considered to be crucial to people's livelihoods in many parts of Melanesia, and thus if fishing is work for Kragur villagers, so too is asking the ancestors or the Virgin for assistance (Smith, 1994). If planting was work for Trobriand Islanders, so too was performing the "magical rites" which made the tubers grow (Malinowski, 1921, 5). Indeed Schwimmer (1979, 301-302) argued that according to Orokaiva people in Papua New Guinea's Northern Province, it is the ancestors who "do the actual producing in the garden;" people's jobs are to plant, protect, be watchful, have harmony in the family, and ward off

sorcery. Walak people also saw this "technical as well as...magical watchfulness" over the land to be part of their responsibility (Schwimmer, 1979, 301).

Furthermore, subsistence activities such as gardening, harvesting and construction are activities in which Melanesians have as much autonomy and experience as little pressure as activities which would usually be classified in English as leisure (Fagin, 1979, Wadel, 1979). For example, whilst it is true that women and older girls expend considerable energy in the gardening and harvesting upon which they depend for their subsistence, it is also true that they produce more than they need to subsist and the time it takes them to do so allows for a significant amount of flexibility which they regularly avail themselves of. Thus, they rest or socialise at will, and if something else interesting is happening they simply go to the gardens earlier in the day and stay for a shorter period of time, so that they can join in with the event.

These examples show that the categories of labour and leisure, which distinguish activities by obligation and autonomy, and by production and pleasure, do not apply well in the Walak context. Gardening, which is productive and necessary, can also be pleasurable (Stent and Webb, 1975) and social activities, pleasurable though they may be, are also associated with obligation (Sillitoe, 2010a). Walak people assume a greater degree of autonomy and flexibility in all their activities than the concept of "work" implies. Though children's activities in school are ordered as "work" (learning) and "leisure" (breaks), outside of school they simply are not distinct.

### **Time Scarcity**

Children's activities in school are also ordered by time. Ob Anggen employed a concept of time typical to formal education - time was seen as limited and relatively scarce. Lessons and breaks were allocated to particular hours of the day, school always started and ended at the same time, pupils were required to arrive on time, staff kept timesheets to claim their pay, and teachers had ambitious goals for what they wanted to achieve within the time that they had with the children. As Ob Anggen took children into four grade levels upon opening, teachers often felt that they were playing catch up with their sister school which had opened several years earlier, and while I was there the hours of the school increased as teachers tried to ensure students could perform at a level appropriate to their grade. The actual practice of teaching was not pressured or rushed and much time was given to singing, games and play. Likewise, if a student didn't finish an activity they were allowed to leave it to the next day. The end of a year was a deadline, though. If a student had not learned enough to progress to the next grade, they would have to repeat the year.

Walak people, however, do not employ the concept of time scarcity as a metaphor for the scarcity of themselves or their labour; they view the relationship between human activities and time differently. Categories of activity aren't allocated to bounded periods of time and unlike the many societies in which time is set aside for activities such as dealing with disputes, illness or children's education, Walak people deal with many of these things as they arise, sometimes informally in ways that look like people being idle or socialising (see also Smith, 1994, 2015). Even when concepts of time order and time scarcity have been introduced, through institutions such as church, Walak people treat them flexibly, so the reliability and rigidity of Ob Anggen's approach to time was a new experience for most Ob Anggen students. They did not, however, seem to be very influenced by it. I have no evidence that Ob Anggen children felt pressured by the lack of time they had outside of school, or that they were treating time as a scarce resource which they needed to manage differently as a

consequence of the time they were spending in school. So far, they seem to be willingly adapting to the constraints on their behaviour which allow for greater efficiency in school and employing no concepts of time scarcity outside of school.

## **Learning Beyond School**

Just as learning takes the place of "work" and is ordered by time in school, thereby creating an echo of the imagined future that schooling prepares children for, so too Walak children's activities outside of school reflect Walak concepts and echo the imagined future that Walak education prepares children for. Thus, "labour," "leisure" and "learning" are not distinct in children's activities outside school, which cannot be distinguished by obligation and autonomy, or by production and pleasure, and which are not ordered by time.

Childcare, for example, is an autonomous play activity that is also productive materially and socially, as well as being a site of learning, as the following example shows.

*Ik (age 6-7) has wandered off, seemingly bored, from where her mother is gardening and has found Karobage (another adult woman) and her two children R (2-3) and P (age 0-1). Ik sits down on the mat and picks up P, touching his hands and trying to push him over, but only half paying attention to him; Karobage gardens nearby. Ik tries to cradle P on her lap but he doesn't really want to be held. Karobage, who is cutting grass with a machete, hears his noises, turns around and shouts at Ik. Ik passes P to her older sister, takes the digging stick from R and starts digging herself while he watches her. Later, she takes the baby back and holds him between her legs. Her older sister is supervising and hits Ik when P falls over. Karobage comes over and, seemingly unprompted, Ik takes her place in the garden and starts cutting down long grass with a machete, looking over her shoulder every now and then to see if we're noticing her.*

Ik plays with P of her own initiative and for her own pleasure. Yet, though this childcare is play, it also allows Karobage to engage more productively in gardening. To an extent, Ik is taking on a degree of delegated responsibility, but her autonomy allows her to give up her attempts at childcare when she chooses. Ik is also learning - she is chastised for how she does childcare by Karobage and by her older sister. R, in turn, learns from watching Ik.

Gardening, construction, and other skills are learned in similar ways. Young children aren't pressured to garden; it is they who choose to pick up a digging stick and play at gardening, and it is they who transition gradually into more productive gardening. As they get older they are sometimes instructed to garden, but no comment is made on their results and if they are hot and tired, or meet people on the way, they take a break, sit in the shade and talk. This example shows the value of autonomy and the lack of a concept of time scarcity in action.

*We arrive at the garden, and Ik stands staring out over the valley while her older sister gets to work weeding. After six minutes, Ik starts weeding with her hands, but less than ten minutes later, she's back to staring out over the valley again. Every now and then she does a bit of half-hearted gardening, or listens to her sister who talks to her occasionally, but the rest of the time she just stands staring. Half an hour later, she does a burst of weeding, stops and stares, takes off her jumper, and then goes to sit, resting in the shade, where she stays until we all have a break.*

Children do have considerable autonomy, but their learning is also shaped by a value for fulfilling obligations. Perhaps the most frequent directive given to babies, for example, is to call someone by the appropriate term denoting their relationship. Though children may not know how or through whom they are related, they soon learn what type of relationship they have with the people they know, and what privileges, taboos and obligations are associated with these relationships. They also learn to fear the consequences of not meeting these obligations.

As these examples show, even the distinction between "incidental enculturation" and "deliberate education" (Varenne, 2007, 1559) does not apply neatly to Walak children's learning outside of school. Much, perhaps most, of what children learn could be described as "incidental," but adults and older children do frequently take the chance to correct, instruct, direct and inform younger children. There are also times when knowledge is intentionally taught. Children learn partly through exposure, partly by overhearing others and listening in, partly through imitation, partly through correction, partly through being deliberately taught and partly through play. All of this learning relates to and mirrors the future that it prepares children to participate in.

### **Imagining Children's Futures**

The activities that Ob Anggen children miss out on while they are in school, such as playing, social activities, childcare, gardening, harvesting, construction and going to funerals, are also learning activities which prepare children for a particular type of future. The education children get in Ob Anggen relates to a different future. Ob Anggen seeks to empower indigenous Papuans by ensuring children can remain living with their families and also access the opportunities formal education makes available. It seeks to prepare children to access further education or employment nationally and internationally. Teachers also desire to see children grow in character and in faith, and hope that they will eventually make a contribution to Papua or the wider world. Some of the Walak parents and church leaders expressed the school's purpose as "preparing leaders for the future who fear God" and as "using education to prepare leaders who fear God to face the era of globalisation."

The presence in one environment of these two different ways of educating children for two different futures raises multiple questions. Are the two different forms of education mutually exclusive? To what extent does participation in one learning environment imply a loss of the future associated with the other, and if it does, who gets to choose what future Walak children should be prepared for? To what extent is participation in the "era of globalisation" a future to aspire to, and to what extent is it a necessity? What are the implications for the wider community of some children participating in formal education?

These are extremely complex questions. One concern about the introduction of schooling to indigenous people who have an alternative education system is that it endangers the cultural identity of the children in school. Ob Anggen children are learning new concepts associated with a foreign worldview. If schooling is to prepare children to participate and lead in an "era of globalisation" then this is an essential part of their formal education: the ability "to communicate, liaise and negotiate with outsiders" (Nichol, 2011, 34) does not just necessitate learning new skills, it necessitates learning new ways of thinking (McLaughlin, 1997). In school, children have to learn to operate within an environment in which time scarcity is assumed. They have to learn to segregate productive work and autonomous play. Autonomy itself is not as highly valued in school as it is outside school; children are certainly not free to

wander off whenever they feel like it, and they are expected to do what their teacher tells them during lessons. This mirrors the future they are being prepared for.

Being in school also causes children to miss out on other opportunities for learning. For example, it limits children's ability to engage with the frequent exchange events, funerals and weddings that happen due to their obligation to attend school (which is founded on the school's use of the time scarcity concept) and their reduced mobility. Although it would seem that all children do at these events is play, socialise and be idle, the time they spend there is important for learning how to participate in socio-political exchange, for beginning to fulfil their own kinship obligations, and for learning specific skills. Heider (1979, 66) described state schools in the 1970s as being in competition with Dani culture, saying "I suspect that the schools will win out sooner or later...every day that a Dani child spends in school is a day away from Dani life. The years of youth, which once a Dani spent learning to be Dani, are now spent in school, learning to be Indonesian."

Walak people did not have this perspective on Ob Anggen, though. Heider's comment uses time spent as an indicator for influence, but as shown, Walak people do not think of time as a scarce resource which must be allocated, prioritised and economised, nor do they see schooling as being in competition with their values or knowledge. On the contrary, nearly all the Walak people I knew were united in their support and enthusiasm for the school and many Walak people saw access to schooling as part of their pathway to self-determination. In this they are not alone (see, for example, May and Aikman, 2003, Munro, 2013, World Indigenous Peoples Conference on Education, 1999). One Walak man told me that if school knowledge *were* in competition with local knowledge and culture, it would be more important for children to retain the latter than gain the former, but that it was not. Ob Anggen staff, too, tended to see children's education in Ob Anggen as being complementary to, rather than in competition with what children learned from their parents and the wider community, a point they were explicit about in parents' meetings.

There is evidence to suggest that education through Ob Anggen and the learning that happens outside school are not mutually exclusive. Ob Anggen is intentionally embedded in the school children's communities, both geographically and socially, so it doesn't just influence local life, it is also influenced by it. Ob Anggen insists that children continue to live with their families (breaking the expectation that a private school will enrol boarders) and as none of the children enrolled live more than about an hour's walk away children continue to participate in and learn from their communities outside of school hours. Furthermore, children have thus far been enrolling in school relatively late - I estimate that none started younger than about six years old. By this age, children already have a good foundation in Walak concepts, values and skills. The school had only been going for about a year and a half by the time I left, but at that point I found no noticeable differences between the two groups in indigenous knowledge and competencies. So far it seems the impact of enrolling in and attending Ob Anggen has not proved to be detrimental to children's indigenous education.

If the two types of learning aren't mutually exclusive, then getting an education through Ob Anggen will not necessarily prevent individuals from accessing the future that the learning outside of school prepares them for. It is likely, however, that students who "succeed" within the schooling system will feel a pressure to make the most of the potential benefits formal education is perceived as offering (Munro, 2013, Sillitoe, 2000). These perceived benefits include bringing "progress" or "development" to themselves, their kin and the area, particularly in the form of material benefits or partnerships with powerful international



partners, overcoming "alleged backwardness," and gaining personal prestige, not least by being the kind of person who is able to make resources available for those who supported them (Munro, 2013, 33). If students end up able to access and leverage power and material benefits because of their education, they are likely to desire and feel pressured to do so, even if they are also equipped to live a rural life similar to that of their parents. It may be pressures such as these, rather than lack of indigenous knowledge and skills for subsistence living, that are the strongest drivers away from rural life for schooled individuals in the future.

These pressures can be immense for individuals who try to bridge between cultural worlds that employ different concepts of time, autonomy, work, social obligation and resource distribution. The values of the diverse cultures they are working between often clash, the expectations on them are incompatible, there are few people who understand the diversity of assumptions they are navigating, and they may feel they have to choose between abandoning their obligations to kin and community or "failing" in the economic and political world for which education was meant to equip them. Ethics around resource distribution provide a pertinent example: an individual who has access to resources and does not redistribute some of these to his or her kin would be considered unethical by most highland Papuans. By contrast, if the same individual did redistribute such resources in order to fulfil his or her social obligations, this would be considered unethical and corrupt by others, including many leaders in this so-called "era of globalisation."

Since, from a Walak perspective, personal advancement and social obligation are inextricably linked, individuals' success in the formal education system would seem to imply social change for the whole area. Munro (2013, 33) cites a Dani university student as saying that he wanted to use his education to benefit his village: "We want to do everything, there is no electricity, people have no shoes, and everything is expensive because there is no road." There are three reasons why such change may be limited, though. The first is that Ob Anggen itself challenges students to think carefully about the value and impact of particular kinds of change, such as increased material wealth, and students may be influenced by these challenges. The second is that students who pursue such goals may be unsuccessful. Munro (2013, 28) argues that social and political conditions in highland Papua make such changes "a highly improbable outcome of schooling." The third is that, although Melanesia has seen rapid and dramatic social change over the last century and schooling has been an important part of this change (Sillitoe, 2000), there are also signs of cultural resilience. Ploeg (1995, 9) in his report on going back to Wanggulam after thirty years absence says that "from the start I was struck more by continuities than by changes" and Smith (1982, 2015) records Kragur villagers' resistance to foreign concepts of time, which he attributes in part to their value for autonomy which became constrained when efficiency was pursued. In other words, indigenous people sometimes find adoption of foreign concepts and values unappealing and choose not to embrace them. Although Walak people believe it is important to prepare the next generation to deal with globalisation and want to do so, this does not necessarily imply a wholesale adoption of foreign concepts.

## **Conclusion**

Does education prepare children for the future or prepare a future for children? The answer, surely, is both. By attending Ob Anggen, children are spending less time playing, participating in social activities, being idle, resting, doing childcare, and engaging in subsistence activities like gardening and construction. They are also being exposed to new concepts of work and time, are having to adjust to an environment in which their autonomy is

restricted, and are having to learn to operate in a model of production very different to the one they learn outside of school. This "loss" is not seen as a loss by Walak parents who do not consider the learning children do in and out of school as mutually exclusive, and there is evidence to suggest that the two types of learning are not incompatible. The clash of values and the resulting expectations on students from foreign and indigenous influences often are incompatible though, and the pressure this puts on schooled individuals who seek to bridge between them can be enormous. Walak children who do not attend school spend their time in activities that prepare them for an imagined future not dissimilar to the lives their parents are leading now. Ob Anggen offers a different type of learning in order to prepare students for an imagined future in which they will have to deal with the influences, benefits and challenges of globalisation. Both forms of education shape the future of individuals and the wider community, but it is the children themselves who will have to deal with whatever the future really brings. Walak children are already navigating diverse experiences, assumptions and concepts in their everyday life, and they, as well as the institutions they engage with, will shape how they continue to do so.

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<sup>i</sup> Ages are approximate. "Primary school age," here, ranges from about age six to about age fifteen, as this reflects the ages of children enrolled in Ob Anggen.

<sup>ii</sup> For more detail on methods, see Shah (forthcoming).

<sup>iii</sup> For more detailed results, including a further exploration of gender differences, see Shah (forthcoming).

<sup>iv</sup> See Bernard and Killworth (1993) for the formulas used to calculate the validity of differences between the two groups.